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ABSTRACT

Much of the confusion surrounding the meaning and distribution of "(i)ci and la" and other partially cognate deictic terms in French can be dissipated if the terms are assumed to be related to the three grammatical persons: "(i)ci" is confined to the first person, "la" has taken over the second person, and "la-bas" has been adopted as a third-person term. Although further work is required to determine whether or not this relationship is the sole determinant of the reference of the items in question, it is clear that pragmatic criteria are of importance in determining deictic reference in French. (MSE)

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A PRAGMATIC VIEW OF FRENCH DEIXIS*

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0. Introduction

French exhibits a number of partially cognate deictic terms (the locative adverbs *ici* and *là*, the demonstrative suffixes *-ci* and *-là*, the pronouns *ceci* and *cela*, the presentatives *voici* and *voilà*, and so on). The conventional English translations of these items involve 'this' or 'here' for the first element of each pair, and 'that' or 'there' for the second. The relationship between the members of these various pairs is, however, unclear. Any contrastive analysis of French and English should account for the lack of correspondence between the two-term deictic systems of these languages — a discrepancy highlighted by the fact that French-English dictionaries, down to phrase-book level, are uneasy about glossing *là* as 'there' and *celui-là* as 'that one', and often give 'here' and 'this one' as alternative translations (see Smith (1988) for discussion and examples). However, just as significantly, the relationship between *ci*-terms and *là*-terms is also an internal problem of French. This paper will examine the opposition between *ici* and *là* (and similar oppositions between various partially cognate deictic terms) and try to draw some tentative conclusions regarding their meaning and distribution. It will be concerned only with exophoric uses of these terms, and not with anaphoric, text-internal reference (*celui-ci* in the sense of 'the latter',

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celui-là in the sense of 'the former', for example). To avoid begging questions and misleading the reader, the French deictics under discussion will not be translated in the English glosses of example sentences.

1. Commonly expressed views

The confusion surrounding the precise nature of the relationship between, on the one hand, *ici* and its cognates (henceforth, *'(i)ci'*) and, on the other hand, *là* and its cognates (henceforth, *'là'*) can be gauged from the comments of both prescriptive grammarians and descriptive linguists, which are frequently contradictory — sometimes to the point of incoherence. A representative selection of views on the matter reveals three main categories of opinion.

1.1. *(I)ci* is an antonym of *là*

The first, and simplest, view is that *(i)ci* is an antonym of *là* — the two items are quite simply mutually exclusive. A large number of authorities imply or state explicitly that the two terms are in opposition, and that the opposition is one of proximity vs. remoteness, with *(i)ci* expressing the former and *là* the latter. This point of view is expressed by, amongst others, Brunot (1926: 423), Wagner & Pinchon (1962: §494), Le Bidois & Le Bidois (1967: §1732), Berrendonner (1979: 349), and Grevisse (1980: §2163), as well as by the *Robert* dictionary (Robert 1978), s.v. *là* (t. 4, p. 7).

1.2. *(I)ci* is a synonym of *là*

The second view is diametrically opposed to the first: it is that, synchronically, *(i)ci* is a synonym of *là* (or that, diachronically, *(i)ci* has taken over, or is in the process of taking over, the meaning of *là*). The alleged synonymy is often characterized as vulgar, substandard, or colloquial (depending on the point of view of the commentator); the basic message, however, is that *(i)ci* and *là*, at least some of the time, mean

the same thing. For Brunot (1926: 423), the distinction between *ici* and *là* has practically disappeared. According to Bauche (1928: 137), *là* is commoner than *ici* in colloquial French, where it serves to indicate proximity as well as remoteness. Frei (1929: 86) claims that the opposition between *(i)ci* and *là* is no longer one of reference (proximity vs. remoteness), but rather one of register (formal ('relevé') vs. colloquial ('populaire')) — his comments presumably apply only to the expression of proximity. Le Bidois & Le Bidois (1967: §1732) observe that *là* frequently assumes the meaning of *(i)ci*, giving the example *Je suis là* in the sense of *Me voici;* whilst Price (1971: 127) notes that

> In spoken French, the fact that *là* is tending to take over the functions of *ici* (e.g., *Je suis là* 'I'm here') has had the effect of obliterating anew the opposition nearness–distance, since *ce train-là*, *celui-là*, can now mean 'this train, this one' as well as 'that train, that one'.

Wartburg & Zumthor (1973: §729) claim that the opposition between *ici* and *là* comes into play only when the two items occur in the same sentence, and that in other circumstances there is a tendency to substitute *là* for *ici* with the meaning of proximity. The same tendency is noted and castigated by the *Robert* dictionary (Robert 1978), s.v. *là* (t. 4, p. 7), whilst Grevisse (1986: §969) regards it simply as a feature of ordinary language ('la langue commune').

1.3. *(I)ci* is a hyponym of *là*

A third and perhaps more subtle view is that, whilst *(i)ci* and *là* are not synonyms, the opposition between them is *inclusive* rather than *exclusive* — in other words, that one is a **hyponym** of the other. Although they do not use this terminology, it is implicit in the comments of several grammarians that they regard *(i)ci* as in essence a hyponym of *là*. Thus, for Wartburg & Zumthor (1973: §730), the localization expressed by *(i)ci* is more definite and more emphatic — the two can have the same spatial reference, but *(i)ci* pinpoints where *là* does not; for Berrendonner (1979: 354, n2), the opposition between *(i)ci* and *là* is not

a negative (understand 'exclusive') one; for Togeby (1982: §388) (and a good many other commentators), *là* is the unmarked term and *(i)ci* the marked one; for Judge & Healey (1983: 81) '*là* is far less precise than *(i)ci*':

> The adverbs *là* and *ici* have, however, lost some of their meaning as specific indicators of place; in particular, *là* seems to be used in a number of contexts in which one would expect *ici*, e.g. (an adult speaking to a child):
>
> viens ici, à côté de moi! ['come *ici*, beside me!']
> viens là, à côté de moi! ['come *là*, beside me!']
>
> This is probably due to the fact that *là* is far less precise than *ici*.

— and the *Trésor de la langue française*, s.v. *ici* (t. 9, pp. 1058-1060) defines *là* as a synonym of *ici* which fails to convey the notion of proximity associated with the latter. This curious definition, which appears at first sight to be a contradiction in terms, could be interpreted to mean that *là* has the same semantic description as *ici*, less the feature of proximity — in other words, that *ici* is a hyponym of *là*.

2. Specific differences and incompatibilities between *(i)ci* and *là*

It is unfortunate that few commentators of any persuasion discuss the division of labour between *(i)ci* and *là* in any depth. We can, however, put their views to the test. If we can find a situation to which only one of the two terms is appropriate, then we may reject the claim that they are synonyms. It will be sufficient to find a situation in which *(i)ci* but not *là* may be used (a special case of the above condition) in order to refute the claim that *(i)ci* is a hyponym of *là*.

Secondary sources provide few relevant examples. One of the rare examples of a non-trivial *(i)ci/là* distinction quoted in a work of reference is the one to be found in Judge & Healey (1983: 81), for whom

'...there is a greater sense of urgency associated with *ici* '. They contrast *Viens ici que je te donne une paire de claques!* ('Come *ici*, so I can slap your face!') with *Viens là que je te donne un bonbon!* ('Come *là*, so I can give you a sweet!'). In fact, their examples are to some extent misleading — it is quite possible to say *Viens ici que je te donne un bonbon*, as well as *Viens là...*; however, many native informants agree that **Viens là que je te donne une paire de claques* is an extremely unlikely utterance.

Work with informants has also yielded the following examples:

• Je suis ici ≠ Je suis là

Je suis ici is virtually tautologous, a statement with an information content approaching zero — it could be paraphrased as 'I am where I am'. *Je suis là*, on the other hand, gives information to the addressee — it would be used, for instance, as the (normal) answer to the question *Où es-tu?*, or to announce one's arrival.

• ?*Je ne suis pas ici

By the same token, *Je ne suis pas ici* is felt by many speakers to be at worst a contradiction in terms or at best paradoxical — it seems to imply 'I am not where I am'. Informants find it difficult to provide contexts in which this utterance is plausible. The indication of the actual or effective absence of the first person from a proximate point normally involves the use of *là* — compare *Je ne suis pas là demain* (corresponding to 'I'm not here tomorrow') and *Je ne suis là pour personne* (equivalent to 'If anyone asks, I'm not here'). The only sense in which *Je ne suis pas ici* was acceptable to a majority of informants was a metaphorical one implying distraction (compare English *I'm not all here*).

• Ici Pierre Dupont/*Là Pierre Dupont

A specific instance in which *(i)ci* alone may be used and *là* is impossible is in the formula used when answering the telephone.

• Monsieur Chirac n'est pas ici ≠ Monsieur Chirac n'est pas là

One informant provided an example of an *(i)ci/là* distinction involving the right-wing politician, Monsieur Jacques Chirac. *Monsieur Chirac n'est pas ici* is the response one might get if one telephoned the headquarters of the French Socialist Party and asked for him; *Monsieur Chirac n'est pas là* would not be an appropriate reply in this context, but would be used to inform someone who telephoned him at his own office that he was away or otherwise unavailable. Compare also *Il n'est pas ici /*là; son bureau est en face* ('He isn't *ici /*là*; his office is across the corridor' — i.e., 'You've got the wrong office') and *Il n'est pas là/*ici; est-ce que vous pourriez repasser?* ('He isn't *là/*ici*; could you come back later? — i.e., 'You've got the right office, but...'). *Il n'est pas ici* denotes **essential** absence, whilst *Il n'est pas là* denotes **contingent** absence. Although it might be possible to force this distinction into the 'hyponym' mould, the use of *ici* in such cases is not really a 'proximate' one; it more accurately indicates corporate identity ('He doesn't work here' or 'He doesn't work for us').

• Viens un peu ici /??Viens un peu là

Finally, we return to the use of *ici* and *là* with the imperative *viens*. Whilst *Viens là* and *Viens ici* are perceived as equally acceptable and approximately synonymous, a majority of informants reject *là* in the presence of the intensifying adverbial *un peu*; thus, *Viens un peu ici* (in the approximate sense of 'Just you come here') is acceptable, but **Viens un peu là* is not. The distinction ties in with that noted by Judge & Healey, and also with the fact that, for several informants, *Viens ici* is the only one of the two utterances which can carry the intonation pattern associated with impatience. One informant pointed out that, in a context of increasing exasperation, the sequence *Viens là, viens là... mais viens ici!* was normal, whereas the sequence *Viens ici, viens ici... mais viens là!* would be bizarre.

3. The rôle of *là-bas*

If we now turn to the expression *là-bas*, the original meaning of which was 'down there' or 'there below' (the only glosses given by Cotgrave (1611), s.v. *là*, for example, are 'Beneath, below; downe, downewards'), we find that it has been co-opted into the deictic system in an interesting way. Wagner & Pinchon (1962: §494) have a rather odd view of *là-bas* as an 'intensive variant' ('variante intensive') of *là*; but in the opinion of many commentators for whom *(i)ci* and *là* are to some extent synonymous proximate deictics, *là-bas* is the exponent of remote deixis (see, for instance, Wartburg & Zumthor (1973: §729) and the *Robert* dictionary (Robert 1978), s.v. *là* (t. 4, p. 9)). For Frei (1929: 149), the opposition between *(i)ci* and *là* was a feature of *français traditionnel*, to which corresponded the opposition in *français avancé* between *là* and *là-bas*. But not only does *là-bas* contrast with *là* as an adverb; it has been pressed into service as a demonstrative suffix, as pointed out by Price (1971: 127):

> In practice, the meaning [of the suffix *-là*] is often clear from the context, but where necessary a distinction can be made, between *celui-là* 'this one' and *celui-là-bas* 'that one', *ce train-là* and *ce train-là-bas*, etc.

and by Harris (1978: 96n11):

> At first sight [...] the distinction of proximity [*-ci* vs. *-là*] may appear to be neutralized. In practice, however, whenever necessary, forms in *-là* are opposed to those in *-là-bas*. Cf *c'est pas çui-là, m'sieu, c'est çui-là-bas*.

However, if we accept that there is still an opposition between *(i)ci* and *là* in French (as is demonstrated by the examples in §2), that *là-bas* contrasts with *là*, and that *là-bas* does not mean the same as *(i)ci* (which, for present purposes, may be taken as axiomatic), then in both the deictic adverbs and the demonstrative suffixes, we have a three-way contrast between *(i)ci*, *là*, and *là-bas*, which has to be accounted for.

4. Deixis and person

We may be able to tie all these facts together if we examine the possibility of there being a correlation between deixis and person in French. There are, of course, many languages and dialects in which a systematic correlation of this type exists — the following are a sample:

English dialects:	1 this 2 that 3 yon	(see Catford 1965: 37 (N.E. Scots) Barnes (1886: 19) (Dorset))
Latin:	1 hic 2 iste 3 ille	(see Lewis & Short (1879), s.v. *hic* (p. 852), *iste* (p. 1005), and *ille* (p. 884))
Tuscan:	1 questo 2 cotesto 3 quello	(see Rohlfs 1968: §491)
Southern Italian:	1 chistu (etc.) 2 chissu (etc.) 3 chillu (etc.)	(see Rohlfs 1968: §494; forms quoted are from the Calabrian dialect)
Portuguese:	1 êste 2 êsse 3 aquêle	(see Cunha 1972: 235)
Spanish:	1 este 2 ese 3 aquel	(see Real Academia Española (1970), s.v. *este* (p. 581), *ese* (p. 565), and *aquel* (p. 109))
Serbo-Croat	1 òvāj 2 tâj 3 ònāj	(see Meillet & Vaillant (1969: 115))

Basque:	1 haur	(see Allières (1979: 61))
	2 hori	
	3 hura	
Turkish:	1 bu	(see Lewis (1967: 71))
	2 şu	
	3 o	
Japanese:	1 kono	(see Clarke & Hamamura (1981: 37-38))
	2 sono	
	3 ano	

It could, of course, be argued that there is a correlation between deixis and person in all languages, but that, in languages which have a deictic system containing only two terms, there will clearly be a certain amount of surface syncretism, and any correlation between the deictic terms and the three grammatical persons will be partly hidden or opaque. This may to some extent be the case in French, and almost certainly is the case in English; the following is an attempt to represent schematically a proposed correlation between deixis and person for these two languages:

(ce...)	(i)ci	1	this/here
	là	2	this/here...that/there
	là (-bas)	3	that/there

It is clear that, in any attempt to correlate a two-term deictic system involving remote and proximate terms with the three grammatical persons, the major problems will arise with the second person. In principle, the first person is unambiguously proximate, and the third person unambiguously remote. The second person is, in this context, ambiguous, being both proximate (as a discourse participant) and remote (as a person other than the speaker). Some evidence of this ambiguity and the consequent problems of correlation is provided by Spalatin (1985) in his discussion of the demonstrative systems of Serbo-Croat and English

— he finds that the first-person form *ònâj* and the third-person form *ònâj* are systematically equivalent to 'this' and 'that', respectively; however, the second-person form *tâj* is ambiguous, and may be equivalent to 'this' or 'that', according to the context. Similarly, Benveniste (1966: 254), in a discussion of the relationship between deixis and discourse, claims that the distinction between *ici* and *là* parallels that between the first-person pronoun *je* and the third-person pronoun *il*, but is unspecific about how the second-person pronoun *tu* correlates with the deictic system. Another aspect of the problem is discussed, in general terms, by Frei (1944: 112), who distinguishes between languages in which the proximate deictic term includes both speaker and addressee and those in which it excludes the addressee and refers only to the speaker. (However, Frei places both French and English in the former category, and assumes that the opposition between *celui-ci* and *celui-là* and the opposition between *this [one]* and *that [one]* are identical. We have seen that this assumption is false, and that the deictic systems of the two languages must be analysed in different ways.)

It seems plausible to argue that, in French, *(i)ci* has retreated and is now confined to the first person, whilst *là* has taken over the second person, either leaving a gap for the third person, or, more likely, coming to cover a deictic space which is too large to be covered by a single term. As a result, there has been pressure to create a third-person term, and *là-bas* has been adopted in this rôle. (If we are dealing with a functional chain, it is surely a drag chain of the type suggested, and not the partial push chain implied by the comment of Grevisse (1986: §969), who claims that *là* may be ousting *ici* because it is itself being replaced by *là-bas*.)

How do the data support this hypothesis, and what are its consequences? We may suggest, tentatively, that all the cases discussed above in which *(i)ci*, but not *là*, may occur correspond to a high degree of first-person involvement. This would be the reason for *Viens ici* being the only acceptable form in the context of urgency, impatience, exasperation, or anger; for *Je suis ici* being tautologous and *Je ne suis pas ici* contradictory (except in the metaphorical sense noted above — it is

interesting to note the parallels with the English expression *I'm not myself*, which is contradictory in any literal interpretation, and is consequently acceptable only as a metaphor); and for *ici* being the only deictic which can be used to announce one's identity on the telephone to an unknown and unidentified caller. Similarly, the person who says *Monsieur Chirac n'est pas ici* is making a statement, *inter alia*, about their membership of an organization or their presence in a certain place — they are to some extent identifying with the subject of the sentence. *Là*, on the other hand, appears to correspond to a high degree of second-person involvement (or possibly, if we accept the argument that it is the unmarked term, to a low degree of first-person involvement). Thus, in uttering *Je suis là* or *Je ne suis pas là*, the speaker announces his presence or absence in a way which is relevant to the addressee, and the person who says *Monsieur Chirac n'est pas là* is not identifying with the subject (he is possibly looking at the question from the point of view of the enquirer). One can indeed imagine the theoretically possible, albeit inelegant, utterance *Monsieur Chirac est ici, mais il n'est pas là!*

In this view, the opposition between *Viens ici* and *Viens là* would receive a plausible account — both can occur in most contexts, but the former emphasizes the speaker, whilst the latter emphasizes the addressee. The same underlying principle sheds light on other cases in which, on account of their occurrence in the same context with apparently identical spatial reference, *(i)ci* and *là* have been mistakenly analysed as synonyms. The following exchange, heard in Provence, provides a good example:

— Nous, on n'a pas besoin de partir en vacances: on a tout ce qu'il nous faut ici.
— Où ça?
— Ben, là.

— We don't need to go away on holiday; we've got everything we need *ici*.
— Where?
— Er, *là*.'

In the opening sentence of this short dialogue, the point referred to is viewed from the perspective of the speaker. With the intervention of the addressee, the perspective shifts, and the speaker redefines the point in question in terms of the second person. The point itself has not altered; but its relation to the discourse participants has.

An example of a similar phenomenon is provided by a mother instructing her small son to wash a spot of dirt off his face:

Là... là... là... (*in exasperation*) ici !

At the word *ici*, the mother pointed to the dirt on the child's face, thereby associating herself more clearly with its position. The context of increasing exasperation here is similar to that described in §2 above.

Finally, we quote the following utterance made by a guide at the Musée d'Art moderne in Villeneuve d'Ascq whilst referring to a collection of paintings by Fernand Léger:

Ici on a ces tableaux-là.
'*Ici* we have *ces* pictures *là*.'

At the beginning of the utterance, the guide was looking at the paintings; whilst making the utterance, she turned to face her audience. Once again, the point referred to has changed not in terms of its physical location, but in terms of its relationship to the discourse participants.

The examples upon which this hypothesis is based are rather few in number, and have an essentially heuristic value. Uses of deictics which would help to confirm (or refute) the present arguments depend essentially on contrasts, and are not normally to be gleaned from published or recorded material; in these circumstances, one has to rely heavily on the intuitions of native speakers. However, a glimmer of support for the analysis presented in this paper can be found in the comments of a handful of grammarians and lexicographers, although nowhere is the correlation between deixis and person worked out explicitly. Thus, Le Bidois & Le Bidois (1967: §1732) claim that the statement *Je suis là*

does not create the same distance between the speaker and the addressee as *Je suis ici;* it conveys the idea that the speaker is within reach of the addressee or at his disposal. The *Logos* dictionary (Girodet 1976), s.v. *là* (t. 2, p. 1757), in one of its glosses of *là*, suggests that it can be used in place of *ici* to signify 'à l'endroit où on est'. A literal translation of this definition is 'in the place where one is' — however, the pronoun *on* has broader reference than English *one*, and, in many registers of French, may encompass the first-person plural (see, for instance, Harris (1978: 122)). The definition might therefore be interpreted as meaning that *là* refers to the place where 'one is' or where 'we are' (including, or at least not excluding, the second person), whilst *ici*, by implication, will refer to the place where 'I am' (excluding the second person). Finally, the *Grand Larousse de la langue française*, s.v. *là* (t. 4, p. 2916), in its second definition of *là*, suggests that the term implies neither remoteness nor a relationship to the first person — without, however, drawing the inference that *ici* does imply a relationship with the first person.

5. Conclusion

Much of the confusion surrounding the meaning and distribution of *(i)ci* and *là* and cognate deictic terms in French can be dissipated if the terms are assumed to be related to the three grammatical persons in the way suggested in this paper. Although further work is required in order to ascertain whether or not this relationship is the *sole* determinant of the reference of the items in question, (for instance, it seems to be impossible for *(i)ci* to be an exponent of remote deixis, whatever the degree of first-person commitment; this constraint may or may not reflect a fundamental incompatibility between the first person and remoteness), it is clear that pragmatic criteria are of importance in determining deictic reference in French.

In a work which appeared after this paper was submitted for publication, Perret (1988: 266-267) claims that *là* is a **situational** adverb in modern French, whilst *ici* and *là-bas* are spatial adverbs, the former **self-referential** (*'sui-référentiel'*), the latter non-self-referential

('*non-sui-référentiel*'). Perret's analysis raises some important points, but cannot account for all the problems addressed in the present paper. I hope to deal with her arguments in a subsequent article.

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